

Outrage over Sweet move

Players and parents rally to save DHS lacrosse coach's job

BY DAVE PALANA, CLIPPER STAFF
SPORTS@CLIPPERPRESS.COM

Duxbury lacrosse players battled for Chris Sweet on the field, winning six state titles in a row — now they're fighting to help their coach keep his job.

Sweet supporters have started a petition drive asking school officials to reconsider their decision not to renew the coach's contract after 14 years on the job.

Teammates like midfielder John Ricciardi hope to meet personally with Superintendent Sue Skeiber to voice their support for Sweet.

"I'm really disappointed and I don't see why [the school administration] did this," Ricciardi said. "I thought he was a great coach and helped me out a lot."

Starting defenseman JB Marston acknowledged that Sweet's style could rub some people the wrong way, but said losing him as coach would be a mistake by the school.

"On and off the field, he helped you be a good guy and a good player. I'm definitely going to fight for him and help to get him back," he said.

Jane Bradley, whose son played lacrosse, started an online petition to keep Sweet at DHS. Bradley sent copies of the petition, which now has over 200 signatures at ipetitions.com, to Skeiber's office and to the School Committee in hopes they will reconsider the decision to let him go.

"I don't have a political stake in this, I just know he is

continued on page 10

Outrage over Sweet move

continued from page one

a great coach and great for the town," Bradley said. "This is a really big deal for the town, not just for the sports program or a few individuals."

One of last year's captains, Kyle Gavoni, voiced support for his coach, saying Sweet gets the best out of his players.

"At times, he was hard, but that's what it takes to win," Gavoni said. "He told us each day, each practice, we needed to get better and got us motivated. He was not trying to be mean or anything like that."

"He plays to win and that is something I definitely respect," added junior attack Kane Haffey. "I feel like, if I was the coach, I would want the best people on the field."

Haffey said he plans on playing lacrosse for Duxbury next season even if Sweet does not return, but said it will also depend on his potential replacement. Ricciardi also said he was not sure if he would play if the school administration stands by their decision not to bring Sweet back.

Sweet thanked the players for their loyalty, but urged every player not to let his situation impact their future in lacrosse.

"As much as I appreciate the intention, they should play," he said. "It's hard for the kids, but I would not want to put players in that situation."

Sweet also works with the Duxbury Youth Lacrosse pro-



Chris Sweet said he wants to remain Duxbury's lacrosse coach.

grams and travel teams in addition to his duties at the high school level. Bill O'Toole, whose son played for Sweet in the youth program, said he hopes the coach will still be around when his son enters high school. O'Toole and a group of parents recently took out a newspaper ad asking the superintendent to reconsider her decision.

"I've never been in a high school locker room with Chris, but at my son's level, I have nothing but good things to say about him," O'Toole said. "I would have him coach my son in an minute, and it's my sincere hope Chris is there long enough to coach [him]."

For his part, Sweet thanked his supporters for their efforts on his behalf.

"It's been very humbling," he said. "It's been an emotional roller coaster and I, for one, hope it was all just a big misunderstanding."

Skeiber returned from a vacation Monday and declined

to comment on Sweet's status. An attorney handling the matter for the school district, Michelle McNulty of Murphy, Lamere and Murphy P.C. in Braintree, was out of the office last week and calls to another attorney at the firm were not returned as of press time.

Sweet said he has not been able to meet with Skeiber since her return. He said the superintendent has never met him face to face.

"I think it would be fair for her to get to know me," he said.

Sweet said he has hired his own counsel, Wayne Denison of Brown Rudnick LLP in Boston. He said that the district cut off all communication to himself and the assistant coach about a month and a half ago. However, he said his goal is not litigation — merely to get his job back.

"The only reason I hired a lawyer is because the school involved theirs," Sweet said. "I'm not looking to sue anyone."

Skeiber informed the School Committee that Sweet's contract would not be renewed for next season at their July 8 meeting, in executive session. Sweet, who has coached for 14 years at DHS, led the Dragons to seven of the last eight Division I state championships. His contract is on a year-to-year basis.

Sweet said he still hasn't received official word from the administration as to why his contract wasn't renewed, although he did address some persistent rumors about his departure (see sidebar).

He confirmed that he has already received offers to coach elsewhere, but reiterated his desire to remain at the high school.

"I still very much want to coach in Duxbury," he said. "That is where my heart is."

Read more reaction to Sweet's contract situation on page 18.

Sweet addresses rumors

While Duxbury Superintendent of Schools Susan Skeiber has not commented publicly on the reasons for the decision not to renew Sweet's contract, one of the rumors circulating in town is that Sweet's decision not to promote three seniors to the varsity team while adding eight freshmen, including his son, was a contributing factor. Sweet stood by his roster moves this week, saying all his cuts were based strictly on the performances at tryouts.

"Whoever made varsity made it on merit, period," he said. "I take personnel decisions very seriously, but you can't please everyone. I have to place 90 kids on three different teams and I think [assistant coach Tony Fisher] and I do a pretty good job."

Sweet also denied the rumor that his involvement with the Under Armour All-America game showed any player favoritism on his part. Sweet was chosen to coach the North team in the non-sanctioned all-star game, where Hakeem Lecky was Duxbury's lone representative and captains Quinn Cully, Kyle Gavoni and Jake Harvey were left off the roster. Sweet said he had no control over the roster for the game and that writers at Inside Lacrosse Magazine made most of the selections.

"I had zero input on who made that team," he said. "I was picked to coach and that was it."

— D. Palana